



Solvitur ambulando

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It is solved by walking

St Augustine of Hippo

Guidelines for Walking the Labyrinth

The labyrinth is a pathway – it winds around from the outside to the centre, and back again. It looks a bit like a maze, but it is not a maze; there are no tricks or dead ends. Labyrinths (like mazes) are known from ancient times, in many shapes and sizes, and nearly always people have seen the labyrinth as a spiritual or symbolic pathway. Some, like ours, are big enough to walk on the path; on little ones, as small as a plate, you trace with your finger. Either way, it becomes quite a journey – you follow it round and round to the centre, pause there, and then using exactly the same pathway in reverse, you return from the centre and the entrance becomes the exit. The path is in full view the whole time, which allows you to be quiet and focus internally.

You will find that once you are on the path it is really easy to follow. You don't need to think about it or work out where to go – it takes you on its own path, and leaves you free to walk on your own inner journey. That's why it is usually walked in silence – even when lots of people are waling it together – so that each one is free to follow their own thoughts and feelings.

To prepare, you may want to sit quietly to reflect before walking the labyrinth. Some people come with questions, some come during times of grief and loss, others just to slow down and take time out from a busy life. Some come to find strength to take the next step. Some come without any fixed idea of what it's for, you just walk it, and maybe a purpose reveals itself as you walk.

There are three basic stages to the walk:

1. **The path into the centre.**
2. **The centre; when you get there, pause for a while – don't be in too much of a hurry to go back.**
3. **The path out of the centre – the same path you walked in on.**

The path winds throughout and becomes a mirror for where you are in your life: it can help you see yourself more clearly.

In Western Christian mystical tradition, it is traditionally called *The Threefold Path*:

1. **Purgation** - releasing, letting go of the details of your life. As you shed thoughts and emotions, your mind quiets and empties.
2. **Illumination** - when you reach the centre. Stay there as long as you like. It is a place of meditation and prayer. Receive what there is for you to receive.
3. **(Re)Union** - joining with God, with a Higher Power or with the healing forces at work in the world.

Pause at the entry to allow yourself to become fully conscious of stepping into the labyrinth. Here are some hints:

- Allow your body to find your natural pace. Your pace may change during different stages of the walk.
- Become conscious of your breath. Let it flow smoothly. It can be co-ordinated with each step – as is done in the Buddhist walking meditation – if you choose.
- The narrow path is a two way street. If you are going in and another person is going out, you will meet on the path. If you want to maintain an inward meditative state, simply do not make eye contact. You can “pass” people on the labyrinth, or allow others to pass you. Allow spaciousness within and honour your pace.
- Pause at the exit to allow yourself to become fully conscious of stepping out into the world.
- Treasure and nurture your quiet mind. Don't be tempted to “talk the experience away” or over analyse it. Honour your experience as you travel home and step back into your routine.

SOME SUGGESTIONS ... SO THAT WALKING THE LABYRINTH MAY GIVE YOU ITS BEST VALUE

The best way to learn about the labyrinth is to walk it with an open heart and mind. Then allow your experience to guide you as to whether this will be a useful tool for you.

One way to walk the labyrinth is to choose to let all thought go and simply open yourself to your experience with **gracious attention**. Usually – but not always – a quieting of the mind happens in the first stage of the labyrinth walk. After the mind is quiet, you can choose to remain in the quiet.

Another approach to the labyrinth walk is to **consider a question**. If you are seeking a clue to one of life's puzzles, you can concentrate on a particular question as you walk to the centre with an open heart and an open mind you are receptive to new insights.

You may ask a question: "What is it that I need to know?" "What healing needs to happen here?"

There is no right or wrong way to walk a labyrinth. If you are open to experience the walk as a metaphor, then anything that happens can serve as an insight. You find yourself confused and "lost" on the path. You have an awkward moment as you meet a fellow walker on the same path. You become irritated that there are too many people in the labyrinth. You are determined to find the "answer" but instead experience nothing... **Walking . . . balancing . . . people . . . perseverance . . .** On the path we meet every and all things. Allow these metaphors to speak to you.

There are many ways to describe a labyrinth. It is a path of prayer, a walking meditation, a crucible of change, a watering hole for the spirit and a mirror of the soul. The rediscovery of the ancient Labyrinth has provided us with a spiritual resource, a walking meditation that for many will transcend the limits of still meditation.

"Walking the Labyrinth has emerged today as a metaphor for the spiritual journey and a powerful tool for transformation. This walking meditation is an archetype, a mystical ritual found in many religious traditions. It quiets the mind and opens the soul, evoking a feeling of wholeness."

Lauren Artress.

The Labyrinth may be a prayer or meditation path as you:

- Reflect on scripture, read a psalm or other sacred text.
- Intercede for the world, for other people, for yourself.
- Let go – just the river that flows without being pushed!
- Use a mantra – repeating a helpful word, phrase or prayer:



COME, HOLY SPIRIT
I AM A CHILD OF GOD
JESUS, SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD, HAVE MERCY
MAY I DWELL IN THE HEART OF GOD
MAY I BE HEALED
MAY I BE FILLED WITH LOVE
MAY I BE AT PEACE

The God who made the world and everything in it ... made all the nations to inhabit the whole earth, and allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live; so that they would search for God ... though indeed God is not far from each one of us. For in God we live and move and have our being.

Acts 17: 24a, 26-28